

WESTERN OBJECTS EASTERN FIELDS
RECENT PROJECTS OF THE
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Projects:

Münster Library, Competition First Prize 1987, construction 1990-93
Blackburn House, London, 1988
Housing Block, Krakow
Paradise Bridge, Amsterdam
Fort Aspern Bridge, 1989
Sculpture Hall for Kassel Documenta, competition entry, 1989
Center for Art and Media Technology, Karlsruhe. Competition 2nd Prize
Frankfurt Kindergarten, 1989
Cosmos Street Office Building, Tokyo, 1989
The Ninja House, first prize Shinkenshiku Competition, 1988
Osaka Follie (Ninja 3), 1989
Tokyo Opera, competition entry, 1986

FRAGMENTATION OF SPACE

Fragmentation whether voids in the inner city or disparate fields of objects which blur the periphery of cities is evidence of a contemporary and fundamental shift in our technological, perceptual and experiential constructs.

Since Benjamin's analysis, cinematic perception can be seen as bringing into question the authenticity of objects; since Virillio's analysis, transparency must be understood as the prevalent computer/communication induced mode of perception. It is now less and less possible to use the model of coherence to understand our fragmented, simulated and transparent spaces.

As perspectival perception became inscribed in the focused plans of cities, so today's voids which refuse codification can be read as positive manifestations of a revolution of perception indistinguishable from the modes of the post industrial technology. In such new fields the status of architecture must be revised.

Our work has been researching these fields through the medium of the project, always avoiding what Lyotard calls the "grand narratives of theoretical causality which have today been replaced by the small narratives of practical opportunity." For the New City Library in Münster the plan reflects a profound change in the status of the storehouse of knowledge. Micro-fische and computer catalogs render information invisible, their "space" and their "access" is different to that of the book on the shelf. The divided plan of the Münster Library reflects this new situation, on one side are found "books," on the other "pure information." This cut becomes a street through the center of the library, a breaking down of the classical hierarchy of public space, facade, interior.

While insisting on its modernity the Münster Library also respects the medieval plan of the city. But as the plan is a reconstruction, so this new insertion is ultimately and necessarily an unfamiliar animal, at once at home and alien to its context.

Although the European city is evolving new forms that we have difficulty as yet in naming, it is still just possible to measure it against inherited models of unity. Not so Tokyo, a city so expanded, so equal in density that it resembles a holographic plate, which, when broken, contains the entire image in each fragment. In such a field, as Barthes pointed out, there is no center and no limit. Due to earthquake laws all objects maintain a marginal but significant autonomy. It is a visual chaos and yet highly ordered by other means, social codes and media saturation.

In measuring this city which may ultimately become the measure for our own we must appropriate the language of the media. Distance is invalidated (all things equally near), things become invisible (Virilio), objects become indifferent to their subject (Baudrillard), and, as Shinohara has pointed out, both traditionally and electronically "Japanese take meaning out where Westerners attempt to put it in."

It was in this context that we pitched our first Japanese project --the Ninja House-- to redefine comfort in the ubiquitous electronic city. Comfort for us was an "Electronic Shadow," a zone of respite from the satellite rain of information, a non-Cartesian black box. Later we explored the idea of surface, of interface as facade and the introduction of scalelessness. This was the idea of the autonomous floating object, the submarine metaphor which was systematically emptied in simultaneous occurrences.

Such Eastern fields function as templates which can ultimately be used to reaccess the current evolution of European cities. For our Rotterdam Tunnel Project the planned tunnelisation means the disappearance of the grand narrative of entrance, the physical connection of center and periphery. In its place floating objects, vector buildings and service satellites set up a new spatial condition, a field of disconnected objects. Again for the "Forum of Sand" in Berlin we proposed the emptying of the so-called cultural center of West Berlin--a circle of pure sand. Selected elements, partial logics, are then reintroduced but remain disconnected. The principle one of these is a relocated bridge, narrative partner to the Mies National Gallery. A bridge no longer connecting but an autonomous hovering public space. This perhaps is the status of architecture, relinquishing control of territory but within itself exhibiting its irrefutable autonomous objecthood.

--Peter L. Wilson
October 1989, lecture at Leuven

